

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Katherine Villeda, and I am a Resident from Bridgeport. I am a member of CT Students for a Dream and growing up, my parents were undocumented. Professionally, I am a policy analyst where my work primarily focuses on providing support to state advocates across the country working towards health care coverage for residents in their states regardless of their immigration status.

I stand in strong support of HB 6616: “An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status”. I am incredibly happy to see the introduction of this bill. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 26 regardless of immigration status builds off of the efforts from the last few years and is an important step in making sure immigrants have access to the care we all deserve, and to reduce the uninsured rate in CT.

I believe that healthcare is a human right and that no one should be denied the care they need because of their socioeconomic status, race, gender, sexuality, or immigration status. Growing up in a mixed-status family, I witnessed first-hand the barriers my loved ones, friends and many community members faced in accessing primary and preventative services because of their immigration status. Care was often delayed because of the fear and uncertainty that came with disclosing one’s status to a medical provider and the possibility of astronomical medical debt. Growing up home remedies were often used until they no longer helped with underlying ailments and emergent care was needed.

Additionally, our work should not end with expanding access up to age 26; we need to open access to HUSKY to all immigrants of any age, including caregivers and adults. When I was three years old my mother had a stroke and was admitted to the hospital. My family was fortunate that Emergency Medicaid covered the costs of my mother’s emergent care. However, due to the lack of access to health insurance because of her status, the care she needed after she was discharged was scarce. The underlying cause of her stroke was later identified and had she had access to preventative care, her stroke may have been prevented altogether. Furthermore, studies show that a parent’s immigration status has a direct impact on whether or not their child is insured and how often they utilize health care services.^{1,2} Providing coverage for caregivers will in turn support better enrollment rates and utilization of primary and preventative services for children and youth.

Access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare for everyone regardless of immigration status is critical to racial and economic justice issues. Lack of access to health care disproportionately impacts people of color of all ages, especially Latinx and Black people. Passage of HB 6616 is a step in the right direction to ensure that access to health care is accessible to those already at increased risk of being left out of the health care system.

¹ [Parental Immigrant Status is Associated with Children's Health Care Utilization](#) (*Maternal and Child Health*).

² [Parents' and Caregivers' Health Insurance Supports Children's Healthy Development](#) (*Society for Research in Child Development*)

Connecticut has the opportunity to be a national leader alongside all of our neighboring states, to join the eleven states³, plus the D.C., who have implemented or are in the process of implementing similar coverage for children and/or young adults regardless of their immigration status utilizing state-funds. Connecticut is not alone in this effort to show what it means to respect and honor immigrants. Immigrants and their families deserve access to comprehensive and affordable health care during a pandemic and beyond. Immigrants have been at the forefront of the pandemic as frontline and essential workers. Despite their essential work, immigrants continue to be excluded from federal and state aid. In order for Connecticut to fully recover from this pandemic, effectively reduce its uninsured rate, and live up to its own goal to be the most family-friendly state in the country, we must ensure immigrants have the right to health care to truly live healthy lives.

I believe Connecticut has the resources, moral obligation, and political will to be a leader in what it means to treat health care like a human right and treat immigrants with dignity. I support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to favorably support this legislation. Looking ahead, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to HUSKY to all income-eligible immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Katherine Villeda
Bridgeport, CT

³ California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington